

## [Mrs. Lelia Bramblett]

[?] June 17, 1938

Mrs. Lelia Bramblett

157 Chatooga Avenue

Athens, Georgia

Hornsby

[?Line ?]

[?Line ?]

When I arrived at Mrs. Bramblett's [Matthew's?], [she?] wasn't home . I rapped on the door, there was no response. I rapped again and a vivacious young girl of high school age made her appearance from an adjoining room, which at one time had served as a barber shop. "Are you looking for grandmother?" I told her I was. " Well just come in and sit down, I am sure she will be here in a minute. She is always gone some place doing something for somebody. My name is Martha Jane Brown, I am her grand daughter. "

I was invited into the living room, It was nicely furnished with modern furniture. In a few minutes Mrs. Bramblett Brantley came in all out of breath. She is a stout person, wearing a print dress black shoes and gray hose. Her hair is gray, she had it plaied in two long braids and it wound around her head. She adjusted her silver rimmed glasses as she came into the room, she has a cute air about her, when she wants to make a statement [?] [emphatic?] she winks her right eye nods her head and says: "Thar you are, huh." [??]

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I got up when she entered the room. She laughed and began: "Well I be swegar you did come didn't ye? Now just keep your chair 'taint no need to git up. Let me git a dip of snuff and I'll with ye. Now lady if you don't like my snuff you needn't bother long or me,, 'cause I am going to dip my snuff and when I dip I got to spit if the president of the United States was here. [???

"So you want me to tell you my life history? Well if I told you all I know it would be a long one, but I don't know nothing so interesting to tell the truth I have been through so much and so many things have happened in the sixty-one year I have been here 2 I have forgot what I did know. Ain't you cold, if you ain't, you look like it all humped over thar writing. I wish I could write I can do right well at reading. Let me see how you spell my name, no that ain't right its spelled with two tt's [heap?] of folks spells it with one though.

"I was born and raised out here at Princeton Factory. My mother didn't work in the mill after she married. She kept house, but Pa did. He made a dollar a day, he ran a picker machine. Do you know what a picker machine is, well you tear a bale of cotton up and put it in the picker, it chews and cut that cotton all to pieces for that room it went to the carding room, then to the spinners on to the weaving room whar it was made into cloth.

"Thar won't but two of us chillun me and my brother. He didn't work in the mill 'til he was grown. My ma and Pa moved to Winder, Georgy after the Princeton Factory closed and my brother went to work there as a weaver. Ma and Pa didn't stay in Winder not more than a year they moved back here and he worked in the Southern Mill. My brother went away out to Ark-an-sas and was put thar when my mother died. I ain't never seed him since. Fer all I know he is dead. When Ma died Pa come to live with us. He died at my house.

"The Lord I pray, I went to work when I was ten year old. I went to school and my blame old teacher tried to make me write with my right hand and I was left handed, it messed my writing up so I jes' quit fooling with 'em and went to work in the mill. I worked in the carding room and didn't made but thirty cents a day, that was con-sidered big money fer a kid to

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make in them days, 3 [?] and chillun went to work by the time they was knee high to a grasshopper. Now a carding machine is a great big machine you feed the cotton to and it comes out in a great big old lap.

“When I was a little girl Ma and Pa moved out to White Hall , to work in the mill for Old man John R. White. He done the same thing at White Hall, he done at Princeton, he was a picker. We lived in a two-room log cabin. We lived in one room and cooked and ate in the other, we lived out there about six months. The one we lived in at Princeton was a nice house for that time. There was two rooms on the first floor and one upstairs they were large rooms, and all the houses were ceiled like this one of mine is.

“When I was little I was crazy about brown sugar. Did you ever see any, We kept it by the barrel at our house, but to me it won't [high?] as good as Mrs. Ridley's Riley's who lived a little way up the road. I use to take my little tin cup and go to her house every morning for brown sugar. It was the best stuff I ever tasted. I never will forget one morning, well I set out with my cup to Mrs. Ridley's. When I got in site of her house I seed a man sitting on her porch. That was the funniest thing to me 'cause I had never seed a man at her house before 'cause she was a widow woman and 'twon't no body lived thar but she and her daughter Willie. When I seed that man I tucked my little tail and started back home, as fast as I could go. She called me back but I didn't pay her no mind. When I got home Ma asked me ‘what's the matter didn't you get no sugar.’ “I told her the trouble and she said; “taint nobody but her brother.’ “I went on back and got my sugar.

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“Not long after that we moved back to Princeton, I sure did miss Mrs. Ridley Riley , one day I happened to go to Mrs. McLerey's McClaskey she give me a tea cake. Back in them days all the houses had paling fence 'round them. Mrs. McLerey McClaskey lived right back of our house. It was too much trouble to go all the way 'round, so I tore a paling off the back fence and every day I would slip through and and go to her house for my tea cakes. I thought she had the prettiest white table clothe I ever saw.

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"Mr. Henry Lovern [? Lawrence?] was the boss and his brother Mr. Horace Fred Lovern Lawrence was the Super (supervisor) over the carding room they were good bosses. They looked after the well fare of their hands, and saw to it that the houses were in good condition and fitten to live in. The size of the house depended on the size of the family you had. If your family was small you had a small one, a big family got a larger house. We rented the houses from the mill and when you got your pay ticket the rent was tuk out of your pay."

She laughed and began: "I am here to tell you the boss was my sweetheart. I went with him 'til he married, me and his sister run together. The reason I didn't marry him I didn't want him. He married Bekkey Dye Bonny? Drew , if this here story I am telling you ever comes out in a book 'course I ain't expecting it to, but if [?] it does I sure hope Henry [give?] gets holt of it and reads it if he is living, and as fer as I know he is. Do you know, he fixed up his house and bought every stitch of the furniture before he was married. He come by my house the day before he married and tuk [??????] 5 me to see his new home. He told me if I would marry him that day the house would be mine. I told him no it won't neither. He was a heap older than I was, me and him jes' claimed each other as sweethearts. I use to get a heap of fun making the girls mad taking their beaus 'way for them.

"I don't recollect nary one of my grandparents on my mammy's side. My grandfather worked in Princeton mill. I don't know if my grandmother worked or not. I heard my ma say she was an Irishwoman and come to this country when she was sixteen year old, they said she was a little bity woman. They lived in Madison County before they moved to Athens, my mother was a Stephens before she married. When my grandmother and grandfather died my mother was just a little girl. There were four girls and two boys, the oldest went to work in the mill and raised the least ones. The oldest were about grown when they come to Princeton. They were weavers and made fifty cents a day. They got twelve and one half cents a cut and they got about four cuts a day which amounted to fifty cents.

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"You know my chillun calls me old fashion 'cause I don't try to dress like they do and talk proper, I don't care none. I tells them I can make rings 'round them now when it comes to doing things. Why, do you know when I was a young girl they use to wear drawers and call they bloomers. We wore long dresses, and cotton stockings.

"I can't say that the health con-ditions in mills were any different back then, for what they are now. Of course there won't no hospitals nor health clinics when the hands got sick & the doctors went up on their profession like they are now and they went on and died like Henry's Joe's first wife. She couldn't give birth to her child, and so she died. Now that is all taken care of. She was sixteen year old to the day when she died, she had been married exactly one year. She worked in the mill before she married Henry Joe , she was a spinner.

"I told you I stopped school 'cause they wanted me to write with my right hand. We didn't have a school house at Princeton the Methodist church was used as a school. Back in them days thar warn't no such thing as free school's. You had to pay a dollar a head for every kid in school that money went for the teachers salary. Miss Jemantha Ward Savannah Wood was my first teacher, Henry's father Mr. Bramblett Brantley was my next teacher, and Miss Barton Brown was the last teacher I had, she taught in a little one room shack. Yes, Miss. Barton Brown tried to make me write with my right hand and I was as left handed as a jack rabbit. Most of my teachers were women, they didn't skeer me, you let the school bell ring, when Old man Bramblett Brantley made his appearance I would begin to cry, I was afraid of that man as a bear. Than the Stypher Smith boys come to Princeton to put up a night school, they taught penmanship. I went one night they wouldn't let me use my left hand so I didn't go back. I ain't ashamed of my reading, when it comes to writing 'bout all I can do is write my name.

"The company had a store. Once a week the hands went to the store and got their supply of rations and it was taken out of their pay ticket. We were paid off once every four weeks. It didn't take much to live on back than. Eggs were ten cents a dozen, butter ten

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7 cents a pound, milk five cents a gallon, fat back sold for four and five cents a pound and chickens ten and fifteen cents a piece, flour was mighty cheap too. People lived at home them days Ma had her own cow, hogs, chickens and garden. They didn't know what conveniences were, it was jes' like living in the country sure 'nough. Didn't have no such thing as restrictions, such as how close the hog pen was to the house and water works were unheard of.

"I am sixty-one year old and I have never been out of Georgy but once in my life. My daughter was living in South Ca'lina they sent me word to come at once she was [dying?] I hustled to see her, she lived jes' a few hours after I got to her house. I bought her chillun home with me and raised them, they are grown and married now. When I was on the train going to see my daughter, when - saw them 'lectric lights I didn't act like Aunt [Nancy?] and Uncle Josh, a reckord we use to have on the graphyphone. I am sorry them old things went out of style, I liked to play the records, I jes' despise a radio."

Her daughter Virginia came to the door and announced supper was ready. Mrs. Bramblett Brantley looked at the clock: "Well I I'll be, I have been talking the blessed afternoon and you haven't finished yet. I know you are tired and I sure am." I asked if I might return early the next morning: "Sure, sure I want you to." When I reached her house early the next morning she was in her bed room, It was in perfect order. On the bed a green frog pillow, a [tabby?] cat was snuggled close to the pillow: "Have a chair and take off your hat and coat, let them dry while 8 you are talking. Let me see I left off yesterday where I went to see my daughter in South Ca'lina." She put her fingers to her mouth and made a [???] through her fingers into the fire.

"After Henry's Joe's wife died he went three year before he ever spoke to me. I ran over him one day in the mill, we started to going together regular after that. We [met at his fathers] house to do our courting. I won't allowed [to ???]. We ran away and married. I was born on [the first day of February?] one minute past twelve o'clock 1878. My ma [said

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I have been?] walking and talking since I was nine months old [and have been?] talking every since. I worked in the mill for six months after I married I reckon you know the rest.

“When I was a little thing they [?] said I was never still five minutes. [Saint Lovern?] [Sid? Lawrence?] told me if I would sit still five minutes he would give a nickle nickel . I sat still but he never give me that nickle nickel . A long time after I had been married, he come back to visit his brother his brother said to me. ‘Lelia do you know who this is?’ [?] “I said no, who is it? ‘It is Saint Lovern [Sid?Lawrence?] he said: [?] “Gimmy that nickel you promised me. He laughed and laughed, why Lelia [Lizzie?] haven't you ever forgotten that. I told him no, and I never would. I called him my sweetheart when I was a little girl. He was a sight older than me, I use to watch for him going to work, when I saw him coming I would hop up on the gate post he come by would kiss me and keep going.

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“We lived at Princeton ten years after we married three of my children was born there and three over here at the Southern Mill. When they were large enough to work all of them worked in this mill down here as weavers. The cloth they made was coarse white cloth, I don't know what it was used for, as all of it was shipped to northern market for sale.

“When Princeton mill shut down, then we moved to the Southern Mill and have been here every since. Yes, we have been living here thirty-one year. When Henry went to work in this mill he done the same kind of work, only he made a dollar (\$1.00) a day.

“In my young days we use to get together on Saturday nights and have our little parties. The older folks danced and the younger ones jes' frolicked and had a fine time. Bless your life we had better be in by nine o'clock or our parents would be out looking for us to find out the reason why.

“I never will forget one week end Pa and Ma went out in the country to spend the night. My ma had taken an orphan girl in the home to raise, she, Ruth Rose my cousin , and me decided to have a dumb [supper.? Did? you? ever? hear? of?] one? We done every thing

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back'ards. I don't remember jes' what [?] we had to eat, nothing but bread and [meat?] I don't believe. Anyway we didn't speak a word while we were having it. Its a wonder I didn't I was such a talker, the girls didn't like me much 'cause I would tell on them. About eight o'clock [??], and Henry Joe come in the back door. We had the table all ready fixed when they got there, we girls were sitting by the fireplace in the kitchen and hadn't spoke a word since we started. I don't knoy know why they went in the 10 back door unless they saw a light in the kitchen. They must have known what [?] was going on 'cause they didn't say a word, Henry sat down in Ruth's Rose's chair first than changed and sat down in my chair. Me and Ruth set our plated on the backside of the table, Emma Edna fixed hers on the front side. She and Jim John married, he later become a Baptist preacher. Henry Joe and Jim John didn't say a word when they come in and sat down, but I did I asked them what they come fer, 'cause we wanted to they daid, I didn't like Henry Joe then so I run them home, Henry Jack married Ruth Rose my first cousin she lived a year. Three year later we married.

"In those day hoop dresses and bustles were a mighty go. I was married in a dove colored dress trimmed in dove colored ribbon. I say silk we didn't know what a silk dress was, they were for the rich. I remember a girl I ran with was going to get married, we decided to borrow the dresses from two girls who had just married. We asked them to lend us their dresses, they said all right, but what are you going to do with them. I wouldn't tell 'em. They lend us every thing they were married in. Dresses, undercoats, drawers, shoes, stocking even to their hats and gloves. [Nettie?] [?] the girl getting married said it would bring her good luck, if I didn't tell what I borrowed 'em for. The next day I marched down to the Justice of Peace with her to get married. On the way I had a fuss with the boy I was to stand up with, we were all ready on the outs with each other a little bit anyhow, so when we got there I wouldn't stand up with him.

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"There was a right smart difference in the way things were run in the Southern Mull than at Princeton Factory, for one thing they had more to do with over here. When we first [?]



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moved to this place there won't a store, church and a mighty few houses on this hill. We had to [?] go way over on Prince Avenue to buy our rations, we bought enough to last two weeks. Rations won't [nigh?] as [high?] as they are now. Every now and than the mill would build a new house. I have seen them go up and now they are going down.

“Way back yonder when any of the hands got sick, the bosses were mighty good about letting them have money and pay it back when they went back to work. When one of the hands died and the family won't able to bury them, the boss let the family have money and pay it back when they could.”

A man in work clothes stuck his head in the door: “Good morning, where is [Gin?] [?] ?” “She had gone to take Naomi to [?] nusery school;” Mrs. Bramblett Brantley answered: “Look here make your self useful and make a fire in the stove it is most [nigh?] time for Gin to cook dinner.” [He?] went in the direction of the kitchen there were sounds of the fire being made by the noise he made. In a short while Gin [Bessie?] , Mrs. Bramblett's Brantley's daughter came in. She like her mother weighs near two hundred, she was wearing a print dress, black sweater and shoes without hose. She took off her coat shook the rain from it, filling her mouth with snuff asked: “Mama did you give the lady some of the candy I made yesterday;” “No, bring us some, it is powerful hard but is sure taste good.” Gin [Bessie?] left the room returning with a huge piece of white sugar 12 candy in her hand, the size of a goose egg, and have it to me. I offered it to Mrs. Bramblett Brantley . “You break it don't want to put my hands on it before you, 'cause I don't know what these sores on my hands might be. Gin you better git to work on that dinner what are you going to cook, some pinto beans?” No, said Gin Bessie : “I bought a bunch of the prettiest collards at the store, you ever seen. I think I will cook them and some dried butter beans.” She soon left the room.

“Yes, we are living in a new day now, about twenty-five year ago we organized a club in the community called the ‘Lend a Hand Club.’ The object of it is to help them that can't help themselves. We look after the sick, buy coal, food clothing and buy medicine.

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The way we make our money is by having suppers, quiltings and sell the quilts. We are planning to have a minstrel at the Community House to night. The admission is ten and twenty cents a very liberty (liberal) price. Jess Baxter [Bill Belau?] is putting it on and every blooming time he comes here it rains. He brings his own [coat?], we don't have enough young folks in this community that has talent enough to put on a dog fight.

"The Community House use to be the school it was first put up for the village, but when this side of town begun to build up the [?] chillun come over here to school. There were soon too many for the school and Chase Street School was built. Now it is used as a gathering place for the village. The girls have a glee club con-ducted by Miss Lucile Crabtree Sila Crawley .

"There were so many chillun on the streets and nothing to do so I went to the authorities of the mill and arranged to have 14 a playground at the Center. Now we have a nice nusery for the smaller ones from nine to eleven-thirty in the morning and a playground for the older ones in the afternoon, they also have indoor games on bad days. This sponsored by the W.P.A. with capable leaders in charge.

"Miss Julian [Johnson?] , I have forgot her first name started the "Lend a Hand Club. She lived over here on Hiawassee, she went to every woman in the village. Them what wanted to join and attend regular was put on one list, the ones can't is put on another, called the honorary list. The dues are ten cents a month.

"Henry got tired of working the mill and decided to change [?] jobs. That was a long time before the mill shut down. He worked on the police force a while then he opened a barber ship right out here by the side of the house and did a good business. After the mill closed he moved it down town as there was not enough business in the village to keep it open. He has been down town every since.

"We have been in this house for seventeen years. We bought it the day Jim Louis , my boy was sixteen. [????] Once I went to the door there stood a darkey, he said: 'Miss don't think

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anything about me standing here, but the last time I was along here, [??] where this house stands was a cotton field. I have picked cotton and pulled corn through her many a day long befo' [?] there was even a railroad run through this place. The only house standing was Mrs. [?] [?] .

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[They used to have Holiness meetings across the railroad] [tracks. One night I was going to meeting, a boy was standing?] on the bridge that crossed the railroad. He holloed at me: 'Mrs. Bramblett Brantley whar are you going?' "I said to the Holiness Meeting, he said: 'to get happy' "I said and stay all night, and from that we got to calling it "Happy Top". It was kinder a rough place too, after it started building up all kind of people started moving in, drinking and cutting up. They were kind hearted in their way, but rough as could be. When the mill shut down, the folks had to leave and the houses have rotted down. You take that apartment house on [Park?] Avenue, it was a nice building. Jes' one family after another lived in it they didn't know how to take care of it, they soon tore it to pieces. I think the rooms rented for twenty-five cents each.

"That mill has never done no good since the war and everything has gone up so. During the war I made thirty-five (\$35.00) a week. They don't pay no such salaries as that now."

A girl came in, she was wearing a gay print dress, a sweater over her head to keep off the rain, and a pair of knee length boots completed her costume. She went over to the fire without an invitation, spitting a mouthful of snuff [?] into the fire, turning to me she asked: "What are you doing taking census?" "No, we are [?] in the movies, don't you think I will make a good actress?" The girl tried every way to find out what I was writing. Seeing that Mrs. Bramblett Brantley didn't want her to know I let her do the talking.

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After she saw it was no use trying to find out what I was writing she remarked: "Well I reckon my feet are dry enough, can I use your phone?" "Yes, but you be sure you don't have any mud on your feet, if you mess up Martha Jane's [Mary Joe's?] room she will

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bless you out.” When she left the room Mrs. Bramblett Brantley said: “Ain’t it funny how folks hang around to find out your business. I am glad you let me do the talking.

“Yes, Mam, times sure have changed terrible, back yonder from what they are now. Even in clothes it use to take five and ten yards of cloth to make a dress now you can get one out of three. The neighbors have changed too, everybody use to be neighborly, helping those that couldn’t help themselves. Now they don’t pay any attention whether they are starving, half clothed or sick. Don’t mix and mingle, or swap jokes like they use to.

“We use to have to go to church or we didn’t go no whar else. When I was a child I use to have to sit on the front seat. When the old women got to shouting I had to crawl up[ on the bench to keep them off my toes, I never wore no shoes to church, all the little chillun went to church and Sunday School bare footed.

“There were no such thing as free schools in my day, but I don’t call them free now heap more chillun would be in school 'round here if they didn’t have to pay so much for the use of their books, pencils and paper as well as other things they use in school now. Chillun won’t made to go to school in my day. That is the reason I quit school and went to work, Do you know 17 I have picked cotton many a day cross that railroad where you see them houses. Rack yonder folks went to work in the mill by the time they was knee high to a duck, now they won’t let 'em work 'til they are too old.

“When I lived at Princeton there was an old darkie who come to my house every Sunday morning and cook breakfast for us. When that coffee got to stinking in the kitchen it made me some hungry. He called us his white chillun. When he left my house and went to cook dinner for my sister-in-law I was right behing him. The [??] other folks cook smells better than that you cook your self. Virginia Bessie came to the door: “Mama are you going after Naomi ?Nora or do you want me to go. Seems to me you ought to have told the woman everything you ever knew by this time.” “I could tell her a heap more if I didn’t have to go to school for the baby, and its eleven-thirty now.” She got up put on a heavy black coat, and

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we started out in the rain, [?] for the little girl, and I on my way back to town. On the way she said: "You think these streets are bad now, but you ought to have seen them several year ago." We turned into Chase Street, she continued: "This street use to be a perfect loblolly before they paved it." We reached the Community Center: "Well this is where we part I sure have enjoyed your visit. Come back to see me and spend the day. If my story gets into print I sure do want to buy one of them books."

[The last I saw of her she was crossing the muddy street in the direction of the Community House?].